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Council builds leaders, officers

By Jeff Troth, MEDDAC PAO



The job of a nurse is to take care of patients. That is true whether you are a civilian or a military nurse. However, Army registered nurses are officers, and part of being an officer is planning military operations. This is something Army nurses don't often have an opportunity to do.

"If you are an Army nurse you spend most of your first four years in the military being on the floor as a nurse," said 1st Lt. Caleb Manning, a registered nurse assigned to Evans Army Community Hospital's Inpatient Behavioral Health Ward. "You don't get the officership and leadership opportunities that you would in a regular Army unit where a new lieutenant is assigned as a platoon leader."

To give young medical officers leadership opportunities, most Army hospitals have a Junior Officer Council, which brings lieutenants and captains of all medical specialties together and put them in leadership positions to plan activities for the organization and in the local community.

"Junior Officer Councils are hospital specific, because in a hospital we are not able to close operations as happens in a line unit," said Maj. Jason Marquart, the Evans' JOC mentor. "The JOC gives junior officers a chance to build Esprit de Corps, learn from each other and give them leadership opportunities they normally wouldn't have. "

Those leadership opportunities come in planning and executing monthly events at the hospital or in one of the communities outside of Fort Carson. These events, which range from the hospital's yearly holiday ball to spending a Saturday helping Habitat for Humanity, to a Pikes Peak Assault.

The Pikes Peak Assault, which occurred in August, took a little bit more planning than the junior officers thought at first. Manning and other council members had to plan for 33 Soldiers and civilians to ascend Barr Trail to the summit of the mountain. This included check points along the trail and an emergency plan in case someone got injured. Once the assault was over the participants needed rides down the mountain.

"We worked very closely with the Medical Company to coordinate vans to get people off Pikes Peak," said Manning. "We had to organize not just to get the vans, but also the gas, drivers, and all the paperwork associated with taking a military vehicle off post. Planning for something like this is something a nurse is not normally going to do."

Besides teaching the young officers leadership skills the JOC is also a time for the junior officers to come together and learn from each other.

"With the hospital having 24 operations, the council allows people whose focus is patient care to concentrate on their officership, and camaraderie with other officers," Marquart said. "It is professional development time and allows them to have time away from work with peers."

Marquart said that the Junior Officer Council builds a team among officers who normally wouldn't work together and might not even know each other due to them working in different areas of Evans. He said that normally a dietician and a nurse wouldn't have a chance to work with each other, but the council allows them to get to know each other and how they may be able to help each other's patients.

"Typically on a medical surgical floor, you see other lieutenants and other nurses and that is it," said Manning. "You don't have the opportunity to see other people in other disciplines. The JOC is great because it brings together people from throughout the hospital and allows us to work as a team."

"The JOC helps me be a well-rounded Soldier," said Manning. "Being well rounded helps me with my mental health. It helps me with my career progression. And the leadership skills I have learned at the council help me be a better leader for my staff, which in turns helps our patients."



Evans Army Community Hospital staff and family take a break at the summit after completing the Pikes Peak Assault. The ascent to the top of the 14,110 foot mountain was planned by the hospital's Junior Officer Council. Courtesy Photo.